

Minutes of Public Works Committee  
Tuesday, December 4, 2007  
7:15 p.m.

Present: Guilford Mooring, Director of Public Works; Committee members Rob Crowner (Chair), Don George, Charlie Moran, Stephen Braun, Vincent O'Connor, and Michael Cann.

**Minutes**

A motion to approve the November 2007 meeting minutes as amended was approved unanimously

A motion to approve the October 2007 minutes was approved unanimously.

**New Business**

Street repair

Mr. Mooring handed out a spreadsheet of Amherst streets detailing their functional status, an estimate of their present condition, and an estimate for the cost to repair, resurface, or rebuild each street as needed. He noted that this is actually last year's list that has been updated only to the extent of adjusting the few streets that were actually worked on this year. The costs indicated, among other things, are low by 10-20% because rising oil prices have driven up the costs of asphalt and other street maintenance materials.

Each year roughly \$450,000 to \$500,000 are earmarked for repaving projects, with about 75% of that total devoted to the repair of "major roads." This money is drawn from roughly \$600,000 that comes to the town from Chapter 90 State funds (raised via gas taxes). The Chapter 90 money is also used for equipment purchase, crack repair, etc.

Mr. Mooring explained that in the years since he took over as DPW director he has "spent down" a roughly \$3 million surplus in Chapter 90 funds in an effort to catch up on street maintenance. That job is not completed, he said. There is now a year's worth of Chapter 90 funds in reserve which allows for efficient disbursement even when receipt of the current year's Chapter 90 state allocation is held up by the state bureaucracy. Committee members agreed that this was a prudent approach.

Mr. Mooring also explained that in deciding on sidewalk repairs, he tries always to match such repair with road repairs, since Chapter 90 funds can only be used for sidewalk construction or repair when it is contiguous with state-funded road repair.

Mr. Mooring said that in February '08 he will be giving the Committee his recommendations for which specific streets and sidewalks to repair in the coming year.

He noted that in selecting streets he tried to “lump” them geographically to minimize the “mobility costs” of contractors.

Mr. O’Connor suggested that Committee members personally drive or visit the roads being recommended and offered to organize a van ride if it was desired.

In response to a question, Mr. Mooring explained that “chip sealing” (i.e. spreading a layer of oil/asphalt and covering it with gravel) is seldom worth the cost unless the street is already in pretty good shape. Rather than chip sealing, he favors an expanded program of crack sealing, which will prolong the life of a street by preventing water from infiltrating the surface.

Mr. Mooring also noted that the cost of “reclaiming” asphalt, a preferred technique because it “recycles” existing asphalt, has risen dramatically in recent years from about 70 cents a cubic yard to \$3 a cubic yard.

Mr. Moran asked if the town can possibly “catch up” on the backlog of streets needing repair. Mr. Mooring said this was unlikely at the present level of funding. One way to pay for the work would be for the town to issue a \$2-4 million bond. This, however, would be *town* money as opposed to state money.

Mr. O’Connor suggested that citizens should pressure state representatives to raise the gas tax in order to increase Chapter 90 funds. Mr. Mooring said that would probably not have the desired result because the state roads are in just as bad a shape and any additional funds from a raised gas tax would probably be diverted to state road repair rather than being redistributed to towns such as Amherst.

Mr. Mooring concluded the discussion with the observation that his recommendation in February will be a 5-year plan, which should allow a broader perspective and perhaps allow for some economies from grouping of projects and/or coordination with other public works efforts such as water and sewer work.

#### Street signs

Mr. Mooring advised the committee that his department will be replacing all town street signs this year in order to conform to new Federal regulations. The new signs will be 9 inches high, with lettering at least 6 inches high. He said he will try to install “double” signs (which identify both streets at an intersection) which the Committee agreed is a desirable effort. The work is expected to cost about \$40,000.

#### New Sidewalks

Mr. Mooring said he may not have staff to do this because of impending budget cuts. He noted that last year’s recommendations to the Joint Capital Planning Commission were not implemented.

A motion was made to have the PWC re-recommend to the JCPC last year's recommendation for new sidewalk construction. After discussion, it was decided to amend the prior list with the addition of the missing section of sidewalk on Old Farm Road. The recommendation is thus:

To recommend to the JCPC that the proposed projects be given this order of priority: first priority, South East Street from Colonial Village to House #136; second priority, East Hadley Road, from South Pleasant Street to House #41; third priority, East Pleasant Street from Village Park to Eastman Lane; fourth priority: missing section of sidewalk on Old Farm Road.

The motion was approved unanimously.

### Sidewalk repair

After discussion and an explanation that the repair list, too, was not adopted by the JCPC, a motion was made to re-recommend the repair list from the February '07 meeting with the addition of repairs to the sidewalk along the south side of Strong Street from Maplewood Drive to Hills Road. Thus the recommendation is:

To recommend to the JCPC that these proposed projects be funded: Triangle Street, east side, from Main to East Pleasant (highest priority); and, with lower but equal priority, Sunderland Road from Montague Road to Pine Street; Lincoln Avenue from North Hadley Road to Fearing Street; two North Prospect Street projects, both from Amity Street to Hallock Street; and the south side of Strong Street from Maplewood Drive to Hills Road.

The motion was approved unanimously.

## **New Business**

### LED Street Lights

Mr. Moran initiated a discussion of LED (light-emitting diode) street lights, since this technology has the theoretical potential of saving money due to their relative efficiency and long life (roughly 4 times that of ordinary gas-vapor lights). Mr. Moran notes that the city of Raleigh, North Carolina has switched to LED street lights and anticipates that their expenditure will be recouped after only 4 years. The city of Ann Arbor, Michigan has installed more than 1000 LED lights after a successful pilot of 25 lights.

Mr. Mooring acknowledged the potential of LEDs, though an experiment with some early models several years ago was not convincing enough to make him recommend them at

the time. He said, however, that he is open to exploring this option again and welcomed the information on potential LED vendors that Mr. Moran provided.

In a related matter, the Committee discussed the virtues of “low cutoff” light fixtures, which save money by using lower-wattage bulbs combined with fixtures that focus and direct the light more specifically on the areas in need. This type of fixture thus saves money and reduces the problem of “spill” into surrounding areas and the nighttime sky.

A motion was made to recommend to the JCPC that it approve Mr. Mooring’s request for \$6000 to purchase and install low cutoff light fixtures in the town, and that the Commission consider the use of LED street lights as a potential option in the future.

The motion passed unanimously.

#### JCPC Updates

Mr. O’Connor requested that the PWC chair inform committee members when items related to the PWC come up before the JCPC. The Chair agreed to do so to the extent that is possible given the sometimes short time-frame of JCPC meeting agenda notices.

The meeting adjourned at 9 p.m. The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, January 8, 2008.

Respectfully submitted,

Stephen Braun